DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 976 CE 070 987

AUTHOR Rioux, J. William
TITLE The Role of Parents in School-to-Work Transition. Education Reform and School-to-Work Transition Series.
INSTITUTION Academy for Educational Development, Washington, DC. National Inst. for Work and Learning.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 96
CONTRACT RR91172012
NOTE 30p.; For related documents, see ED 381 666-670, ED 384 815, and CE 070 986-988.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Education Work Relationship; High Schools; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Partnerships in Education; *Transitional Programs; *Work Experience Programs

ABSTRACT

To qualify for the grants provided through the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, states/localities must develop school-to-work systems containing three core elements: school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities. Parent involvement in those activities is both valuable and necessary. Research has provided extensive evidence that parents' involvement in their children's education helps reinforce students' perceptions of the value and relevancy of learning and motivates students to be successful. School-to-work programs provide a useful framework to help schools structure systems that involve parents in the world of high school. Successful systems both support parents and draw on them as resources. Studies have demonstrated that carefully structured partnerships between parents and teachers, administrators, counselors, and employers can increase students' motivation to success in both school- and work-based learning. Strategies to encourage parent involvement can range from loose, informal communication to highly structured councils and committees. Parent involvement may take many forms, including serving on advisory committees and functioning as informed monitors of school-initiated home-based assignments. School systems must develop systemwide policies emphasizing new approaches to parent involvement, and teacher and administrator training in working with parents must be expanded. (Appended are guidelines for parents seeking to get involved in school-to-work transition systems.) (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Education Reform and School-to-Work Transition Series

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION

ED 391 976

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CE070 987

AED

National Institute for Work and Learning

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The National Institute for Work and Learning seeks to bring the work, education, government, and community sectors together around the shared goal of working collaboratively to improve education-work relationships in the interests of individuals and society. Three areas of concentration define the Institute's activities: successful youth transition; worklife education and adult literacy; and productive aging. The Institute accomplishes its mission in each of these areas through research, program documentation and evaluation, policy analysis, technical assistance and training, and information networking.

The Role of Parents In School-to-Work Transition

by
J. William Rioux

Prepared for
National Institute for Work and Learning
Academy for Educational Development

The Academy for Educational Development, founded in 1961, is an independent, nonprofit service organization committed to addressing human development needs in the United States and throughout the world. Under contracts and grants, the Academy operates programs in collaboration with policy leaders; non-governmental and community-based organizations; businesses; governmental agencies; international multilateral and bilateral funders; and schools, colleges, and universities. In partnership with its clients, the Academy seeks to meet today's social, economic, and environmental challenges through education and human resource development; to apply state-of-the-art education, training, research, technology, management, behavioral analysis, and social marketing techniques to solve problems; and to improve knowledge and skills throughout the world as the most effective means for stimulating growth, reducing poverty, and promoting democratic and humanitarian ideals.

This work is part of the Studies of Education Reform program, supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Office of Research, under contract No. RR 91172012. The program supports studies and disseminates practical information about implementing and sustaining successful innovations in American education. The opinions in this document do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

The Academy for Educational Development is registered with the U.S. Agency for International Development as a private voluntary organization. The Academy is exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to the Academy are tax deductible.

Funds for printing and dissemination of this publication were provided by the Academy for Educational Development.

Printed in the U.S.A.

1996

Contents

Introduction	1
School-to-Work Transition: Important Issues	2
Research on Parent Involvement in Education	3
Roles and Relationships: A Framework	5
Parents and Teachers/Administrators	6
Parents and Counselors	7
Parents and Employers	8
Strategies for Parent Involvement in School-to-Work Transition	9
Recommendations	10
School Systems and Schools	11
Teacher Training	11
The Broader View	12
Work	12
Conclusion	13
Appendix: Guidelines for Parents	15
References	21

Introduction

Education reform is converging two significant movements: the mandate for a better system of school-to-work transition for our nation's youth and a call for increased parent involvement in students' learning. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provides both a catalyst and a framework for states and localities to work with new partners to structure a system that will support all students as they progress from school to productive careers. Simultaneously, conclusive research findings from communities nationwide point to the value of increased parent involvement in schools.

The connection between these two movements sets the ground for a powerful, new dynamic of shared vision, joint goals, and cooperation between parents and educators. Who more than a parent wants to ensure that a child leads a productive and fulfilling life? And who more than an educator has the ability to apply research, experience, and resources to help a student gain the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in tomorrow's economy? While educators have long promoted the value of parent involvement in schools, such partnerships have most often occurred in early grades. Now, this school-parent-child partnership must continue through the middle school years and into the difficult world of high school.

This paper suggests ways for school personnel—teachers, administrators, counselors, and other staff—to view parents as resources and to bring them into the school-to-work process. To clarify parents' role, this paper

- discusses some important issues in school-to-work transition
- briefly presents research findings showing the value of parent involvement
- addresses roles and relationships between parents and teachers/administrators, counselors, and employers
- discusses strategies for increasing positive relationships
- offers recommendations for enhancing parent contributions in school-to-work transition systems

An appendix provides some specific guidelines for parents to increase their effectiveness in the education system and their child's transition from school to work.

Today, the word "parent" unintentionally limits the outlook necessary to think constructively about who will nurture and raise a child. Many students do not live with both parents or either parent; many live with and are cared for by aunts, uncles, grandparents, older siblings, or nonfamily members. As stated in *The Washington Post* on November 3, 1994, "All evidence is that one out of every four children is being raised by people other than parents." We use the word "parent" in this paper as a

convenience; the same conditions and relationships apply to other family and non-family members on whom the student relies for support. Throughout this discussion, the larger-than-conventional "parent-as-provider" view is needed; in many instances, the term "family" itself has to be inclusive enough to include any responsible adult who has accepted the role of caring for a child.

School-to-Work Transition: Important Issues

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act provides a broad framework to help the institutions of learning and work involve all relevant partners as they work to become more closely connected. The federal government serves as a catalyst by providing seed money that supports localities and states to develop customized systems for their own communities. The National School-to-Work Opportunities Office, jointly operated by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, awards development and implementation grants to states and additional grants to advanced local partnerships and high-poverty areas to support the development of a comprehensive system.

To qualify for the grants, states and localities must develop systems that contain three core elements: school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities. School-based learning provides a program of study that integrates rigorous academic and occupational skill standards and supports students in their exploration of career majors through career awareness and counseling activities. Work-based learning helps students gain experience in the adult world of work and skills in general workplace competencies through structured work or training experiences and individual partnerships with adult mentors. Connecting activities coordinate the involvement of students, parents, employers, and educators in a school-to-work system by structuring courses that help students recognize the connections between school- and work-based learning, by matching students with appropriate employers, by training mentors, and by continuously reaching out to partners.

The school-to-work initiative is distinctive in two significant ways: it supports the creation of a system for all students, and it develops broad new partnerships. Both of these factors impact the operation of schools and classrooms, and both point to the value and necessity of involving parents.

Because school-to-work transition systems must be structured to support all students, the outlook for many involved needs to shift, and school operations need to change. In school-to-work systems, the separation between college- and noncollege-bound

students is no longer clear, nor is the corresponding division in types and quality of services. All students benefit from the opportunity to learn more about careers, develop employment readiness skills, experience work-based learning, and receive individual guidance in assessing their interests and competencies and in crafting their career path.

Some parents and educators are stuck in an outdated mind set and insist on categorizing school-to-work programs either as preparatory programs for a handful of the best students, or, more commonly, as vocational classes for students who will never go on to postsecondary education. Parents in particular can be hard to convince that a school-to-work system does not limit future options, but rather broadens the possibilities for students and helps them make informed decisions about careers.

Thus, parents should be included in all phases of the design and implementation of a school-to-work transition system. Developing school-to-work systems demands creating new partnerships, including business, higher education, social service agencies, community-based organizations—and parents. The concept of school-to-work acknowledges the investment that each partner has in successful transitions. Businesses need competent, skilled workers; educational institutions want to reduce dropout rates and ensure that students graduate with meaningful credentials; and social service and community-based organizations provide support services to ensure that youth and families have other needs met so they are able to learn. Parents are a natural and essential partner in the transition process because their hopes for their children complement and extend the other partners' goals.

Research on Parent Involvement in Education

The evidence that active involvement of a parent in the education of a child results in increased levels of achievement and improved prospects for success is now established beyond dispute. In the past, some denied this belief because of a lack of evidence, while others blindly accepted it on faith as a common sense connection to the way human beings grow and prosper. The substantial documentation and research evidence is continuing to accumulate and shows benefits to students, school personnel, and parents themselves (Henderson and Berla, 1994).

One specific benefit to students is improvement in achievement measured by factors such as better grades, higher test scores, and increased graduation rates (Rioux and Berla, 1993). In addition, students whose parents are involved in their school life tend

to improve their motivation, self-esteem, behavior, attendance, and communication with teachers and family (Wikelund, 1990). Parent involvement in a young person's education helps reinforce the student's perception of the value and relevancy of learning and motivates the student to be successful.

Parent involvement in education can also benefit school personnel. Research shows that in schools where staff reach out to involve parents, the school climate, the community perception of the school, and the morale, motivation, and job satisfaction of teachers improve (Rioux and Berla, 1993). Studies also point to the cost effectiveness of programs that equip parents with the knowledge and resources to help their children, thus providing the benefit of an additional person who is able to spend customized time with students (Wikelund, 1990).

Finally, involving parents may also result in benefits to parents themselves and, in the long term, has a positive impact on society. Parents who are involved in their child's education usually increase their self-esteem and ability to communicate with and help their child make informed decisions about the future (Wikelund, 1990). In some programs, parents may participate in training or enroll in courses that increase their parenting ability, work-related skills, or educational level. Efforts already under way with "hard-to-reach" parents provide optimism and motivation for substantial outreach (Garlington, 1991; Davies et al., 1992).

Because parents should be involved in their child's education from the earliest grades, many schools are trying to encourage this partnership. Parent involvement programs in the early school years are a useful investment in social capital and provide a solid foundation for a child's future. However, continuing parent involvement in high school is harder for both parents and teachers to structure. Yet, this is the time that students need increasing support and assistance to help them navigate the world that has opened to them—a world offering further education and career opportunities as well as drugs, alcohol, gangs, crime, and teenage pregnancy. Unfortunately, as children grow older, parents are less likely to be involved. School personnel by themselves cannot deal with all of these issues for each child in the school.

School-to-work provides a useful framework to help schools structure systems that involve parents in the difficult world of high school. Successful systems both support parents and draw on them as resources. The result is parents are in a position to reinforce the value of learning and to provide support to their children in the transition from school to work.

Roles and Relationships: A Framework

It is not an easy task to involve parents in their child's education: both parents and school personnel encounter many barriers, such as transportation issues, schedule conflicts, lack of time, and a general uncertainty about how to structure parental involvement. Even if they could find the time, parents from all walks of life are unsure of how to get involved in their child's education. School personnel who reach out to parents must recognize each parent's individual circumstances and attitudes and then be proactive about crafting policies that respond to the various needs of parents.

Many parents—not simply those in disadvantaged circumstances—need extraordinary kinds of help to move from an inactive or minimal role in a student's education to a more informed and influential role. Economic and social changes have left parents facing challenges ranging from being a dual wage-earning family to being a single-parent family and from working in a demanding, high-skilled job to surviving on low levels of income. To spend time with school personnel, parents may need support such as child care, scheduling flexibility, or transportation services. In addition to these barriers, some parents may also have memories of unhappy and unproductive school years.

Although school personnel are not always able to address all of the barriers, they should be aware of the influence of such barriers and be able to determine whether intervention is necessary through other resources, such as programs offered by community-based organizations or social service agencies. School personnel must be on the alert for signs that the parents as individuals may be in need of services before they are strong enough and are sufficiently energized and motivated to provide assistance to their child. A proactive attitude on the part of school personnel—such as a readiness to reach out, to arrange for unconventional meeting places, and to provide more detailed information on a broad range of topics—is critical to a successful partnership.

Nothing can substitute for personal contact between school personnel and parents. The face-to-face meetings that allow for provision of information, insight based on shared experience, and, perhaps, even a note of humor, find no substitute in printed information and telephone calls. Parents need to understand that they and school personnel share the same main focus—the success of each child.

Educators should offer various opportunities for small groups of parents to meet with other parents off school grounds. These nonschool settings help many parents feel comfortable talking about aspects of their lives that form their values about schooling and about future education and careers for their children. Meetings of small groups in

nearby homes of other parents, in church halls or community centers, or at a student's worksite are important alternatives to large group meetings. Small group arrangements will often be much more successful in encouraging parent participation than will large group meetings.

The answers to the following questions can provide educators and employers with an understanding of the values that parents bring to the various roles they play as partners in the school-to-work process.

- Do parents feel their work and past jobs were influenced by their education?
- What are their hopes for their child's future education and career?
- What are their ideas and definitions of success for their child?
- How do they feel about the future?
- What do they remember about school?

The answers offer (1) insight for increasing the sensitivity of school and worksite personnel about the investment parents can and will make in helping with the school-to-work transition process, (2) an understanding of barriers to parent involvement, and (3) the willingness of parents to overcome barriers.

Parents and Teachers/Administrators

Having day-to-day contact with students and probably a heightened awareness of issues that would benefit from parent involvement, teachers are commonly the most active proponents of parent involvement programs. When administrators proactively support attempts to involve parents, programs achieve their greatest success.

The involvement of parents in the school-to-work process has a silent, reinforcing influence on their child. Students who see parents becoming involved with school personnel realize that school deserves time and attention. Although some adolescents protest about having a parent show up at school, they often acknowledge that they begin to think differently. Before becoming a source of influence for a student, a parent who continually emphasizes the importance of school and "a good education" may have to set an example, such as regularly communicating with teachers. The parent's role in relation to the teacher should include a readiness to follow through on school-related home assignments. Increasing documentation indicates that parental commitment to this broad area of "at-home" help is of considerable importance (Dauber and Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1991; Rich, 1992).

Parents and teachers themselves also benefit from this cooperation. Once a parent is involved, a valuable dynamic is set in motion: teachers have higher expectations of students whose parents are involved and have improved opinions of the parents. And in return, parents generally become more satisfied with the school system. The bond between adults can positively influence a student's outlook, motivation, and performance.

Involvement can be structured in many ways. For instance, the We Can! program in Denver, Colorado, seeks to establish networks among parents and empower them to help their children succeed in school (Rioux and Berla, 1993). Manual High School, which supports the program, focuses on improving the achievement of students who are below grade level. The program "requires" that all parents of incoming ninth graders attend an orientation meeting with their children, attend school with them one day a year, and participate in one parenting workshop. This allows parents to meet their child's teachers and become familiar with the school resources. A particularly creative incentive to encourage parents to participate is the school administrator's recruitment of the support of parents' employers. The principal sends letters to each parent's employer requesting that the parent be excused for one day a year to visit the school. We Can! has resulted in more parent support for teachers and the school system, greater satisfaction for teachers as more parents volunteer in the school, and, most importantly, increases in student achievement.

Parents and Counselors

The school guidance counselor faces formidable barriers in attempts to help students make appropriate choices about their future. The guidance counselor in most high schools has between 300 and 600 students to counsel; thus, providing individual attention to each student is extremely difficult.

Guidance counselors usually devote the little available time to assisting students with college admission requirements. Most school guidance counselors are unable to offer much advice to students who expect to have a high school diploma or both a high school degree and community college work and who are headed to the world of work (Orfield and Faith, 1994; Allum, 1993; Mendel, 1994). Often, counselors can access only outdated and unreliable labor market data, do not have the opportunity to learn about current job-market requirements, and do not approach parents as resources (Herbert, 1987).

Yet, the potential impact of parents in this situation is unparalleled. In information sessions structured by counselors, parents learn to become resources of practical career advice and connections for students and can serve as ambassadors for school-to-work transition systems to the community as a whole, as well as to their own employers. Many work-based learning opportunities for students have been initiated by parents who serve as a liaison between their employer and the school counselor or other staff.

Parents can also serve as a resource for their own child. Counselors who give parents access to career information and involve them in individualized planning sessions for their children have experienced great success. For example, at Roy High School (Roy, Utah), every student has a customized Student Educational Occupational Plan, which lays out both career goals and the school- and work-based learning experiences needed to attain these goals (Charner and Hubbard, 1995). One to four times a year, counselors meet with students and their parents to provide information, help assess students' talents and skills, ensure that students are taking the classes that allow them to reach their goals, identify appropriate work-based learning opportunities, and direct students and parents to other resources. Because counselors are flexible, they can schedule the meetings before, during, or after school hours to accommodate parents' schedules. School administrators have committed to support counselors through lower student-counselor ratios; flexibility in scheduling; simplified access to sophisticated, up-to-date career assessment and labor market information; and training.

Parents and Employers

The author of this paper has carried out intensive on-site reviews of the role of parents in school-to work action projects in eight urban areas (School to Work Action Programs, funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation). The sites were diverse in size, geographic location, administrative agencies, and project designs. Work-based learning took place at various sites, such as hospitals, banks, insurance companies, and financial service firms. From this experience, some valuable conclusions can be drawn about the relationship (or lack thereof) between parents and work-based learning opportunities:

- Parents who visit worksites and confer with worksite personnel working closely with their child gain information that leads to new forms of encouragement by parents regarding the challenges confronting the student in the school-to-work transition process.

- Parents need to monitor home-based assignments from worksite personnel just as they monitor school-initiated home-based assignments. This involvement proves to be a key ingredient in the progress of the school-to-work student.

- Parents realize that the partnership with worksite personnel is important evidence for students that adults form partnerships in support of children's efforts. This realization has a reinforcing effect that increases contacts.

- Parents may profit personally from worksite contacts by learning about new jobs and training possibilities for themselves. These contacts improve self-esteem and the role-model potential of unemployed or underemployed parents and increases student motivation to succeed.

While many employers believe parent contact is helpful, they are often hesitant and cautious about the way to proceed. Some worksite personnel need simple encouragement from school personnel and/or parents; others need specific advice and "training" about how to structure contacts with parents. Such contact works two ways: parents can call or visit the worksite to obtain more information about progress and problems, and worksite personnel can contact the parent at home or through the school to share information or request help. As long as agreements are worked out with key school personnel, both parents and worksite personnel benefit from this partnership.

Strategies for Parent Involvement in School-to-Work Transition

In recent years, developments in the research surrounding parent involvement in education have been exciting. Strategies to encourage positive involvement range from loose, informal communication to highly structured councils and committees. Depending on local school policies, structures, and community circumstances, school personnel might find some of the following approaches helpful to structure their own parent involvement programs.

Some school systems have created local school councils in which parents share the responsibilities and decision making in the school operation. Parents help to review and decide on school concerns including budget, personnel, and curriculum issues. Although the number of parents who serve on these councils is usually small, many

parents are involved through the election process leading to service on the councils and through the obligation felt by elected members of councils to report regularly to those who elected them. Serious consideration should be directed to more involvement by parents in the planning, developing, and implementing phases of school-to-work opportunity programs. Parents represent an untapped resource that informs the process and, as such, can be a critical part of the local partnerships that are mandated to lead the school-to-work initiatives in communities.

Parents can increase the quality of their contribution to the transition process by serving on advisory committees that provide a structure for giving advice to and raising questions with school and worksite personnel. Parents often feel more confident in raising difficult questions and requesting assistance when they are part of a group as compared to meeting alone with school or workplace personnel. Parents can also play a pivotal role in reaching out to other families and organizing input into the school-to-work transition process. Many parents will respond positively to another parent for whom they feel a kinship based on similarities in problems of raising children, age, economic circumstances, and a wide variety of other issues that impact the daily life of parents.

The role of the parent as an informed monitor of school-initiated home-based assignments has generally been hindered by inadequate guidance about what is expected and what techniques to employ. The work of Moles (1992), Clark (1993), and others indicates that student performance improves when home-based parents incorporate specific guidelines to help their child and when they understand the procedure for reporting a student's progress to school personnel. Therefore, those planning and directing school-to-work programs must create methods that take advantage of the talent and potential of parents as a resource.

Opportunities for parents to see students in work settings, to assess the learning potential, and to serve as additional connection back to the school setting should be increased. This kind of opportunity is at the heart of increasing the parent contribution to the school-to-work transition process.

Recommendations

School-to-work transition initiatives can strengthen a growing movement toward the positive involvement of parents in improving program outcomes. By providing

opportunities to discuss the worlds of learning and working in which both parent and child participate, school-to-work can become a common ground for positive parent-child interaction.

School Systems and Schools

More school systems must develop systemwide policies that emphasize new approaches to parent involvement and that reward such approaches on a par with other professional efforts. School-to-work transition program leaders should initiate such policy. The need for substantial revision of parent involvement practices is as urgent as the need to reform school curriculum. To leave these practices unattended will lessen the potential success of school-to-work transition programs.

Although parent rooms, which encourage a congenial atmosphere, are available in some schools (few at the secondary level), parent centers need to be created. In most cases, these centers would

- be in a nonschool setting in the community
- have a one-stop potential where parents could receive a broad range of assistance
- assist with parent involvement in school
- be a place for parents to receive information or advice on career development; educational opportunities; work-based learning; job training; and social, health, and legal issues
- be excellent neutral ground for meetings of school personnel, parents, and worksite personnel

Teacher Training

In an era when parent participation is acknowledged as having a positive impact on student achievement and success in school, few teachers and school administrators have been trained to work with parents. Thus far in the 1990s, the commitment or allocation of time to this area in teacher training institutions is no greater than 25 years ago (Shartrand et al., 1994). To ensure a substantial expansion of teacher-initiated parent involvement efforts, professionals must be trained to work with parents. Because of the expanded view of education that school-to-work efforts represent, leaders of these programs could significantly influence curricula changes.

The Broader View

All educational efforts would have greater success if they increasingly involved the community. The school-to-work transition effort demands collaboration with many community agencies and resources. Some school systems have realized the need of such a collaboration as they planned and implemented a wide variety of reform efforts (see Rioux and Berla, "Chapter 6: District-Wide and Community Programs," 1993). Much of the success of students in school-to-work transition systems depends on a broad contact with community resources.

To ensure that each of the partners integral to the school-to-work transition process has the necessary information about programs and leadership personnel in the community, a resource person could be hired. This "broker" would offer advice and suggestions about available community resources that would best serve a particular student, family, teacher, or worksite leader.

It is essential to involve professional personnel who understand and advocate the larger view that a variety of places outside the school are important counterparts to efforts within the school. The family and the home must become better known and understood—not only at a distance and through reports, but also by direct contact. To provide appropriate professional services, school personnel need to be aware of complications in a student's life outside of school and must be supported as they seek to learn more about services (such as family service agencies, mental health clinics, or recreational services) or about life in subsidized housing. The attention and planning directed to these factors will add significantly to the levels of success attained by each student.

Work

Finally, a campaign is needed to re-instill the centrality of work. It is implicit in school-to-work transition programs that good jobs are a goal worth struggling to attain. But on a larger scale and a deeper level, it is explicit, as Stephen Hamilton says, that learning to work means learning to be an adult. Beyond the perfectly respectable goal of earning a decent living, the significance of work gives life meaning and valuable reference points. To recruit parents as allies and establish an important life-long principle for the student, school systems and worksite personnel can, with help from specialists in media and advertising, initiate campaigns about the importance of work.

Conclusion

Those who care for children outside of school have enormous influence on the success or failure of school-based initiatives. Involving parents in the education of the student in the school-to-work movement has never been clearer or more urgent. The parents represent for the student a built-in reflection of the outside world, what work means, and what work can mean. No one else offers the same possible contribution.

This paper has highlighted the unmatched influence of parents and presented examples to overcome barriers and to involve parents. Those most responsible for developing and implementing school-to-work transitions are encouraged to seize upon the potential of parent involvement to help ensure the success of each student.

Appendix: Guidelines for Parents

How to be involved in school-to-work transition systems

This appendix offers some practical guidelines for parents who are interested in becoming involved in their child's education. School personnel can share this appendix as a stand-alone document with interested parents. The first section addresses some basic questions that parents should be able to get answered about their child's records, school policies, work-based learning options, additional resources, and other information. The second section briefly discusses programs and services parents might want to tap into or start up themselves.

Asking questions: the first step in successful involvement

The role of parents to the student in school and in early employment is to be a monitor, mentor, and advocate—a source of encouragement and support. Each of these and other roles played by the parent requires information. One important way to gain information is to ask questions. As simple as that sounds, it is often a daunting step for parents. Parents must recognize that asking questions is appropriate and reasonable. Since educators are often parents as well, they should understand the caution, reserve, or fear that parents of students in school-to-work programs might have about asking questions. While parents should feel free to ask questions that would help them understand their child and the school operation, some areas are natural beginning points.

- **Records**

  Parents should feel free to ask to see their child's school records. Although this access has been a law for over 20 years, many parents are not aware of their right to ask, and some educators are not fully advised of the rights parents have. Discussions with school personnel about material in the file can reveal important information. Whenever necessary, parents should ask for specialized material in school records (such as test scores, specialized placement tests for special education, and educational language used by psychologists and other specialists in writing reports) to be explained.

- **Services and Policies**

  To avoid possible conflict and minimize misunderstanding, parents should ask about school services, expectations, and procedures:

- services that school counselors provide
- availability of special help in reading and mathematics
- availability of a designated staff advisor other than the school guidance counselor
- copies of school policies and procedures (such as discipline, reporting times, absences, and appeal procedures)

- **Work and Employment**

Experience in real-life work creates a special connection between parent and child because students look to their parents as resources with many years of experience in the world of work. Parents can enhance their own base of knowledge about work and employment by asking questions about work-based learning options offered by their child's school, such as internships, job shadowing, cooperative education, vocational programs, career academies, and apprenticeships. Parents should learn about the roles of the school and employers in these programs, as well as about the projected goals and expectations of the student.

Parents should ask school personnel for the best available information about the longer-term job market and the availability of jobs and training. The more parents know about the job world, the better prepared they are to support and help their children make difficult decisions. For example, parents might find out from school and worksite personnel in their community that training in a broad field, such as health care, is better than training in a narrow field, such as nursing. This knowledge would better equip parents to help their child make appropriate course choices.

Parents should ask how their child's coursework supports career goals. School personnel will explain the training that prepares the student to succeed in broad job categories. School staff will also discuss the relevance of coursework—for instance, explaining that certain general courses that appear to be non-job-specific are vital in a world that requires a basic understanding and sophistication about events outside the immediate job world. Most students—not only those in school-to-work programs—tend to resist coursework they feel they will not need later in life. Parents can successfully address such objections and support school efforts by understanding the rationale behind both job-specific and general course requirements.

- **Additional Local and National Resources**

  Parents should ask school personnel about recommended community resources that could help them secure information about employment training, job placement, and after-school study centers. School personnel will advise parents about toll-free national resources that can help them to find out how other parents cope with problems and make contributions to school-to-work transition efforts.

- **The Student**

  Parents should ask how their child performs in relation to her/his ability and, to a lesser degree, where she/he ranks in relation to other students. A parent should look at this information with the understanding that intelligence and achievement test results are highly influenced by factors such as self-esteem, health, motivation, nurturing, and encouragement by influential adults. School personnel will explain the use of such tests and what they do and do not measure. Nevertheless, to establish baseline understandings for short-term considerations and longer-term thinking and planning, parents must have a familiarity with the effect outside factors have on school success. Parents should also ask about the relationships their child has with other students and the teaching staff. While parents usually have a general sense of peer and adult relationships outside the school, knowledge of in-school interpersonal relationships helps the parent to advise and encourage the student or to look for more information and assistance.

Important programs and services

- **Information**

  Parents must have current information about the short-term and long-term work world and about their children's ability to function in it. In a rapidly changing, increasingly global economy, parents need to know the demands and expectations their children face. More and more of such information is available on audio-visual tapes and discs and in libraries. School personnel can help parents access this information and can play an important role in encouraging parents to become computer literate and in showing them how to independently access such information. Being open to learning new ways to access information helps parents use materials that previously may have been difficult to find or even unavailable.

Parents should also be able to access information about the school-to-work transition system in their child's school. Parents are in a strong position to positively influence the school-to-work transition only if they understand and agree with the key personnel involved. For example, if a child is not doing well in school, the parents must intervene if they do not understand or agree with teachers' actions.

Parents are also an invaluable source of information and can serve as resources for school personnel. Talking in a friendly but straightforward way with teachers will increase the frequency and effectiveness of parent contacts. For example, a parent who knows that the school building is not the most comfortable place to meet and that more parents would attend meetings if they were held outside of school (in church buildings or community centers, etc.) should share the information with school staff. For another example, a parent who feels that school personnel are unaware that educational vocabulary and jargon intimidate some parents and, therefore, discourage them from participating as a resource should communicate this information to the appropriate school personnel. Parents are in an important position to help teachers learn that factors such as where a meeting is held, how it is planned, and what language is used deserve special attention.

- **Support and Advocacy**

Parents can multiply their collective strength and wisdom by joining with other parents. Whether parents join the local PTA unit, a parent group not officially identified with the school, or a parent support group in a community agency, the potential for parents to help each other deal with problems and celebrate successes is enormous. In the school-to-work transition process, parents organizing and meeting with other parents whose children are in school-to-work programs add value to the program. Parents individually and collectively could compile a needs list. School personnel are often surprised (and chagrined) to learn how ill-informed parents are in knowing how best to work with others who are outside their daily experience. Taking the initiative to create a needs list is one way parents can speed up and focus the process of becoming as fully engaged as possible in a partnership role with educators in the school-to-work transition.

If families are experiencing problems that hinder them from participating in their children's education, school and community officials should be able to direct parents to appropriate resources to help them deal with these barriers. The community, whether a city/town or county, offers legal, family service, child guidance, and

mental health resources. In addition, programs are available to help adults with problems of self-esteem, additional training and education at community colleges, and high school equivalency programs.

Parents should be special advocates for their children in matters related to the school-to-work transition. In most instances, school personnel will have the experience to suggest such special help first, but parents must always be ready to raise difficult questions and press for review of special needs and additional help that may be needed. Good partnerships allow for such situations, whether they involve remedial reading, tutoring, speech therapy, or help with social and emotional problems.

As more and more schools begin implementing new school-to-work programs, parents can and should play a role in letting the school know what would enable them to become effectively involved in school-to-work transition. The guidelines outlined above offer strategies that can encourage parents to be active partners in the school-to-work transition of their children.

References

Allum, Keith. *Finding One's Way: Career Guidance for Disadvantaged Youth.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 1993.

Charner, Ivan, and Hubbard, Susan. *Roy High School Case Study Report.* Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, 1995.

Clark, Reginald M. "Homework Focused Parenting Practices That Positively Affect Student Achievement." *Families and Schools in a Pluralistic Society.* Nancy Freyl Chavkin, ed., State University of New York Press, 1993.

Dauber, Susan, and Epstein, Joyce. "Patent Attitudes and Practices of Involvement in Inner City Elementary and Middle Schools." *Families and Schools in a Pluralistic Society.* Nancy Chavkin Freyl, ed., State University of New York Press, 1993.

Davies, Don; Burch, Patricia; and Johnson, Vivian. "A Portrait of Schools Reaching Out: Report of A Survey on Practices and Policies of Family-Community-School Collaboration." Baltimore, MD: Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, February 1992.

Epstein, Joyce L. "Effects on Student Achievement of Teacher's Practices of Parent Involvement" in *Advances in Reading/Language Research* (vol. 5). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1991.

Garlington, Jocelyn. *Helping Dreams Survive.* Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1991.

Henderson, Anne T., and Berla, Nancy. *The Family is Critical to Student Achievement.* Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1994.

Herbert, Debora. *Career Guidance, Families, and School Counselors* (Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Digest). Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services, 1987.

Mendel, Richard. *The American School to Career Movement: A Background Paper for Policy Makers and Foundation Officers.* Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 1994.

Moles, Oliver, Ed. *Schools and Families Together: Helping Children Learn More at Home, Workshops for Urban Educators.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1992.

Orfield, Gary, and Faith, Paul. *High Hopes Long Odds.* Indianapolis: Indiana Youth Institute, 1994.

Rich, Dorothy. *Megaskills: How Families Can Help Children Succeed in School and Beyond.* Washington, DC: 1992.

Rioux, J. William, and Berla, Nancy. *Innovations in Parent and Family Involvement.* Princeton, NJ: Eye on Education, Inc., 1993.

Shartrand, Angela; Kreider, Holly; and Ericson-Warfield, Marti. *Preparing Teachers to Involve Parents: A National Survey of Teacher Education Programs.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, 1994.

U.S. Department of Education. *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning.* Washington, DC: 1994.

Wikelund, Karen Reed. *Schools and Communities Together: A Guide to Parent Involvement.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1990.

AED Board of Directors, 1996

Sol M. Linowitz, Honorary Chairman of the Board:
Former Senior Counsel, Coudert Brothers; former U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States; and former Chairman of the Board, Xerox Corporation

Cassandra A. Pyle, Chairman of the Board:
Executive Director Emerita, Council for International Exchange of Scholars

John Diebold, Chairman of the Executive Committee and Vice Chairman of the Board: Chairman, The Diebold Institute for Public Policy Studies, Inc.

Joseph S. Iseman, Secretary of the Corporation:
Counsel to Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison

Stephen F. Moseley, President and Chief Executive Officer

Robert O. Anderson:
President, Hondo Oil and Gas Company

Barbara B. Blum:
President, Foundation for Child Development

Roberta N. Clarke:
Associate Professor and former Chair, Department of Marketing, School of Management, Boston University

Alonzo A. Crim:
Professor, Department of Education and Special Assistant to the President on College and School Partnerships, Spelman College

Joseph Lewis Dionne:
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Harriet Mayor Fulbright:
President, Center for Arts in the Basic Curriculum; former Executive Director, Fulbright Association

Marie Davis Gadsden:
Chair Emerita, OXFAM; former Deputy Director, National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education

Frederick S. Humphries:
President, Florida A&M University

Walter F. Leavell:
Health Advisor; Former President, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science

F. David Mathews:
President and Chief Executive Officer, Kettering Foundation; former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare

Sheila Avrin McLean:
President, Association of Executive Search Consultants

James A. Perkins:
Chairman Emeritus of the Board, International Council for Educational Development

Frank H.T. Rhodes:
President Emeritus, Cornell University

Joseph E. Slater:
President Emeritus, Aspen Institute, and Chairman, John J. McCloy International Center

Niara Sudarkasa:
President, Lincoln University

Willard Wirtz:
Former U.S. Secretary of Labor

This paper was written for the Academy for Educational Development's National Institute for Work and Learning's Study of School-to-Work Transition Education Reform which is part of the Studies of Education Reform program, supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Office of Research, contract No. RR 91–172012. The program supports studies and disseminates practical information about implementing and sustaining successful innovations in American education. The opinions in this document do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education or the Academy for Educational Development, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

AED

Academy for Educational Development

Principal Offices:

1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20009-1202
Tel: (202) 884-8000
Fax: (202) 884-8400
Internet: admindc@aed.org

1255 23rd Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20037
Tel: (202) 884-8700
Fax: (202) 884-8701
Internet: admindc@aed.org

100 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011
Tel: (212) 243-1110
Fax: (212) 627-0407
Internet: adminny@aed.org